EUMEDCONNECT3: catalysing research and education in the Eastern Mediterranean

The EU-funded EUMEDCONNECT programme has been providing support to research and education (R&E) networking in the Mediterranean region since 2004. Now in its 3rd phase, the project is run by GÉANT in partnership with its regional counterpart ASREN to support R&E networking in Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine. The NRENs of Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy and Spain are also actively involved EUMEDCONNECT3 partner countries connect at the ASREN PoP in London (Slough) where they interconnect with the GÉANT network.

In this article, we highlight the key achievements in the areas of networks, education, healthcare research, and capacity building.

Words: Silvia Fiore, GÉANT

A catalyst for NRENs

EUMEDCONNECT3 catalysed the formation of the Lebanese NREN, TechCARE. The TechCare Consortium was formed in 2018 and now counts 10 member universities. Thanks to the project funding the institution leveraged bulk purchasing power and reached a framework agreement with a single internet service provider, which eventually enabled free peering between the universities. Starting off with 10Mbps in 2016, Lebanon’s international R&E connectivity is now at 5.26Gbps.

In Palestine, with support from the regional REN, ASREN, and GÉANT, the EUMEDCONNECT3 is working towards the re-establishment of a local NREN and the development of R&E infrastructures. Thanks to the community’s support, Palestine is now officially listed as national eduroam roaming operator and plans are underway for local institutions to join eduGAIN.

Support to Education

The EUMEDCONNECT3 co-funded bandwidth played a key role in the survival of education institutions in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic in the region. It facilitated the swift transition to distance learning and working from home with a series of real-time communications and videoconferencing tools for students and teachers. These tools provided the opportunity to remove barriers to education by enabling inclusive delivery methods accessible for all. The project also lobbyed for a reduction of 4G charges for students in Lebanon.

The EUMEDCONNECT3 project is also supporting SESAME, the synchrotron-light for experimental science and applications in the Middle East. The particle accelerator can be used to study the properties of materials with unrivalled opportunities for international collaborative research in areas such as developing new materials, designing pharmaceuticals, probing the structure of DNA, assessing archaeological artefacts, measuring soil pollution and more.

Support to Research

Specifically in Lebanon, the access to reliable connectivity was vital to coordinate multidisciplinary efforts for combating COVID-19 by raising awareness and collecting research data through a shared portal; to enable international collaboration for virtual surgical support; and to ensure secure accessibility to remote consultations.

Support to Healthcare

As part of the EUMEDCONNECT3 project, ASREN is facilitating a blended Identity Federation training course, from Nov 2020 to March 2021 in conjunction with GÉANT and assistance from RENATER and GARR. The course focuses on developing the skills required to create national Identity Federation infrastructure for eduGAIN. This, in turn, is key to enabling collaborative access to digitised online content and resource sharing against the backdrop of accelerated plans to move towards online teaching, collaboration and virtual operability.

The Research and Education Network for the Eastern Mediterranean

EUMEDCONNECT3 also provides connectivity to 40 currently running Horizon2020 projects in total in the region on agriculture resilience, food and water management, energy research, and refugee protection.

“Advanced connectivity is essential for regional and international interdisciplinary research and for scientists to fully reap the benefits of SESAME. The ASREN connection prepares the ground for SESAME to become the scientific hub in the Middle East and for tackling the data deluge in the years to come.”

Dr. Khaled Toukan, Director, SESAME

“The network co-funding received from the EU was the catalyst that got the TechCARE - the Lebanese NREN started. Without this funding, Lebanon would still be without an NREN.”

Dr. Yousif Asfour Chief Innovation and Transformation Officer and CIO, American University of Beirut (AUB) President of CIO Lebanon Association

Check EUMEDCONNECT3 website to read the latest news.
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The project is also supporting students in the Erasmus+ programme, which gives NRENs the opportunity to expand the reach of eduGAIN and eduroam and enable access to these services anytime and anywhere.

Support to Healthcare

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Support to Research

The EUMEDCONNECT3 project supports SESAME, the synchrotron-light for experimental science and applications in the Middle East. The particle accelerator can be used to study the properties of materials with unrivalled opportunities for international collaborative research in areas such as developing new materials, designing pharmaceuticals, probing the structure of DNA, assessing archaeological artefacts, measuring soil pollution to name but a few. It is set to become the scientific hub in the region for tackling the data deluge in the years to come.

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Support to Capacity Building

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